International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
Volume 6, Issue 5, Sep. – Oct., 2026, pp: 477-488 ISSN: 3048-6874
www.ijhssm.org

Perseverance Without Fixation? Grit Facets, Conscientiousness, Perceived Goal Attainability and Quarter-Life Crisis Severity in Emerging Adults

Dr. Dr. Sora Pazer
IU International University of Applied Science, Erfurt, Germany
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8928-705X
Correspondence: Dr. Dr. Sora Pazer, Independent Researcher. E-mail: sorapazer@gmail.com

Date of Submission: 16-10-2026 Date of Acceptance: 30-10-2026

Abstract
Grit is widely recommended to young adults, yet its two facets behave differently, and consistency of interest may be a liability when a chosen path must be abandoned. In a cross-sectional survey of 171 emerging adults recruited on Reddit, perseverance of effort was associated with lower quarter-life crisis severity ($\beta = -.44$, $p < .001$), whereas consistency of interest was not negatively associated with severity once perseverance was controlled ($\beta = .05$, $p = .556$). Entering BFI-2 conscientiousness reduced the perseverance coefficient by 62% (bootstrap 95% CI [38%, 101%]), and total grit added no variance beyond conscientiousness ($\Delta R^2 = .001$). Perceived goal attainability moderated the consistency–severity association ($\Delta R^2 = .033$, $p = .005$): consistency went with greater severity where goals seemed hard to attain and with lower severity where they seemed attainable. Persistence appears adaptive only where its direction remains viable; longitudinal work must establish ordering.

Keywords: grit; perseverance of effort; consistency of interest; conscientiousness; goal attainability; quarter-life crisis; emerging adulthood

I. Introduction

A twenty-six-year-old who has spent seven years preparing for a single profession, and who still wants nothing else, is usually described as admirably gritty. If the profession has in the meantime become practically unreachable, the same steadiness of interest may look different: it may be the reason she cannot let the plan go. Whether steadfast interest is an asset or a liability in the third decade of life is the question this study addresses.

Grit, defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007), has become one of the most widely communicated constructs of positive psychology. Its popular reception treats it as a single virtue. The measurement literature does not. The Short Grit Scale (Grit-S; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) contains two facets, perseverance of effort and consistency of interest, and the meta-analysis by Credé et al. (2017) found that perseverance carries most of the criterion validity, that consistency is weakly related to outcomes, and that grit as a whole is so strongly correlated with conscientiousness that its standing as a distinct trait is in question (see also Credé, 2018). Studies of well-being point the same way: perseverance is the facet related to flourishing, whereas consistency frequently contributes little or nothing once perseverance is held constant (Datu et al., 2016; Disabato et al., 2019; Hou et al., 2022).

The distinction matters most where goals are revised. Emerging adulthood, the period from the late teens through the twenties (Arnett, 2000, 2015), is the part of the life course in which occupational, relational and residential commitments are formed, tested and frequently abandoned. For a sizeable minority this revision takes the form of a quarter-life crisis, an episode of felt entrapment, disconnection and loss of direction that is followed, in many cases, by reorganisation (Robinson, 2015; Robinson & Wright, 2013). Recent cross-national work indicates that such episodes are not confined to Anglophone samples (Robinson et al., 2025), and the Developmental Crisis Questionnaire (DCQ-12; Petrov et al., 2022) now allows crisis to be assessed as a continuous severity dimension rather than as a retrospective yes-or-no judgement.

Two literatures thus meet without having been brought together. Grit research has studied achievement, retention and well-being, but not developmental crisis. Research on the quarter-life crisis has described its phenomenology but has not asked which dispositional correlates distinguish young adults who report severe crisis from those who do not. The present study joins them with four prespecified hypotheses: whether perseverance is associated with lower crisis severity, whether consistency of interest is not, whether any

International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
Volume 6, Issue 5, Sep. – Oct., 2026, pp: 477-488 ISSN: 3048-6874
www.ijhssm.org

association of grit with crisis severity is largely shared with conscientiousness, and whether perceived goal attainability moderates the association between consistency of interest and crisis severity.

II. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1 Two facets with different theoretical implications

In Duckworth's two-facet conception, perseverance of effort describes sustained exertion in the face of setbacks, while consistency of interest describes the stability of one's focal goals over months and years (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The facets are correlated but not interchangeable. Von Culin et al. (2014) reported that they relate to different motivational orientations, and Jiang et al. (2020) found grit related to subjective well-being both between and within persons, with an association that overlapped with basic need satisfaction. Across more than a hundred countries, perseverance but not consistency was associated with well-being once the facets were modelled separately (Disabato et al., 2019), and a meta-analysis of grit and subjective well-being reached the same conclusion (Hou et al., 2022). Validation work in a collectivist setting found perseverance to carry validity that consistency did not (Datu et al., 2016), and cross-national studies point in the same direction (Vazsonyi et al., 2019).

Perseverance of effort is, in content, a form of industriousness: finishing what one begins and not being discouraged by setbacks. Consistency of interest is something else. It concerns whether goals change, and therefore whether a person is disposed to keep pursuing the same end. In most life circumstances goal stability and goal success coincide, which is why the two facets are usually positively correlated. In circumstances where the pursued end becomes unreachable, they can diverge: one can continue to work hard while redirecting effort, but one cannot redirect effort while insisting on the original goal.

2.2 Goal disengagement and the cost of persistence

Theories of self-regulation have long held that disengagement from unattainable goals is adaptive. Klinger (1975) described a cycle of invigoration, frustration and eventual disengagement from incentives that can no longer be obtained, and control-process accounts link negative emotion to insufficient progress towards a goal (Carver & Scheier, 1990). Brandtstädter and Renner (1990) distinguished tenacious goal pursuit from flexible goal adjustment, and the motivational theory of life-span development specifies that goal engagement is functional while opportunities are favourable and goal disengagement once they have declined (Heckhausen et al., 2010). Wrosch and colleagues showed that people who can disengage from unattainable goals and re-engage with new ones report better subjective well-being (Wrosch, Scheier, Carver, & Schulz, 2003; Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, et al., 2003), and a meta-analysis confirmed that goal adjustment capacities are associated with quality of life (Barlow et al., 2020). At the level of individual goals, Brunstein (1993) found that commitment was associated with favourable change in well-being only where the goal was perceived as attainable.

These findings imply that stable interest is not unconditionally beneficial. Lucas et al. (2015) showed that grittier individuals persist on tasks even when persistence is costly, which suggests that the disposition does not include a built-in sensitivity to the value of continuing. Whether persistence is judged worthwhile also depends on the goal itself: Pury et al. (2024) found that ratings of courageous action were tied to the perceived value of the goal pursued. The quarter-life crisis is, on Robinson's (2019) account, frequently a locked-in experience: a person remains in a commitment that no longer fits because leaving it appears impossible. Consistency of interest describes exactly the disposition to remain. The question is therefore not whether consistency is good or bad but under which conditions it is associated with developmental distress.

2.3 Grit and conscientiousness

Any claim about grit must first establish that it is not a restatement of conscientiousness. Conscientiousness comprises organisation, productiveness and responsibility (Roberts et al., 2014; Soto & John, 2017), and the meta-analytic correlation between grit and conscientiousness is high enough to raise doubts about discriminant validity (Credé et al., 2017). Facet-level analyses show that grit maps largely onto the industriousness and self-control aspects of conscientiousness (Muenks et al., 2017; Schmidt et al., 2018), and the distinction between grit and self-control is conceptual rather than empirical in many data sets (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). Low conscientiousness is, in turn, a reliable correlate of depressive and anxious symptoms (Kotov et al., 2010). If grit is associated with lower crisis severity, the most parsimonious reading is that this association is

International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
Volume 6, Issue 5, Sep. – Oct., 2026, pp: 477-488 ISSN: 3048-6874
www.ijhssm.org

largely shared with conscientiousness; an incremental contribution of grit has to be shown, not assumed.

2.4 Hypotheses

Four hypotheses were fixed in the written study protocol before recruitment. The directional language of the theoretical accounts above is the language of the theories; the hypotheses themselves concern associations.

H1. Perseverance of effort is negatively associated with quarter-life crisis severity.

H2. Consistency of interest is not negatively associated with crisis severity once perseverance of effort is controlled.

H3. The association of grit with crisis severity is reduced substantially when conscientiousness is entered as a covariate.

H4. Perceived goal attainability moderates the association between consistency of interest and crisis severity, such that consistency is associated with higher severity when goals are perceived as unattainable.

H3 concerns shared variance. Because all variables were measured on one occasion, the reduction of the grit coefficient when conscientiousness is entered is a statement about overlapping variance, not about intervening processes, and the reversed ordering is reported alongside it. H4 is a statistical interaction and presupposes only that perceived attainability is not itself a consequence of consistency of interest; the near-zero correlation between the two in the present data (Section 4.2) is compatible with that assumption.

III. Method

3.1 Design and procedure

The study used a cross-sectional, correlational design with a single online questionnaire session of approximately 15 to 20 minutes. After demographic items, instrument blocks were presented in randomised order, with items in the published fixed order within each block. Consent was given by an explicit affirmative action before any item was displayed, and every participant received a debriefing page listing low-threshold support services. The design, hypotheses, instrumentation and analysis plan were fixed in a written study protocol completed before the first participant was recruited, so that the confirmatory status of the hypotheses is verifiable.

3.2 Participants and recruitment

Participants were recruited through posts in topic-relevant communities on the social platform Reddit. Eligibility (age 18 to 29) was established by screening items presented before the first substantive item, and posting was extended to further communities during fielding in order to broaden the composition of the sample. No quota was imposed and no demographic target was set, so the achieved composition reported below is a property of who chose to respond. Participation was voluntary and unpaid. This study was conducted on its own independent sample, collected specifically for this study: no dataset of the research programme has been used in more than one manuscript, and no participant contributed to more than one study.

The analysed sample comprised 171 emerging adults aged 18 to 29 (M = 22.97, SD = 2.93). Of these, 90 (52.6%) were women, 77 (45.0%) men and 4 (2.3%) non-binary. Seventy-five (43.9%) were students, 40 (23.4%) were employed, 22 (12.9%) were in a career-entry position or internship, 21 (12.3%) were in vocational training and 13 (7.6%) were seeking work or in an orientation phase. There were no missing values and no duplicated identifiers. The protocol planned 200 complete cases; 171 were achieved, and all analyses use the achieved sample (Section 3.5).

3.3 Measures

All instruments used a five-point response format (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), were scored as item means and were keyed so that higher scores indicate more of the named construct. Reliability was estimated in the present sample as Cronbach's α and McDonald's ω (McDonald, 1999; Dunn et al., 2014).

Grit was assessed with the eight-item Short Grit Scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), comprising perseverance of effort (four items, e.g. 'I finish whatever I begin'; α = .70, ω = .71) and consistency of interest (four items; α = .75, ω = .75). The consistency items are negatively worded in the original and were reverse-scored. The total score was used only for the supplementary H3 analysis (α = .80).

Conscientiousness was measured with the 12-item conscientiousness domain of the Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2; Soto & John, 2017), e.g. 'I am systematic and keep things in order' (α = .93, ω = .93).

Perceived goal attainability was assessed with six items referring to the participant's most important current life goal, e.g. 'My main goal is realistically achievable', in the tradition of goal-appraisal research (Brunstein, 1993) (α = .89, ω = .89). The item set was specified in the study protocol.

International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
Volume 6, Issue 5, Sep. – Oct., 2026, pp: 477-488 ISSN: 3048-6874
www.ijhssm.org

Quarter-life crisis severity was measured with the 12-item Developmental Crisis Questionnaire (DCQ-12; Petrov et al., 2022), e.g. 'I cannot see how my life connects from year to year' (α = .88, ω = .88). In line with the protocol, crisis was analysed as a continuous severity score; the cut-off specified in the protocol (mean item score ≥ 3.00, equivalent to a sum score ≥ 36) was used for descriptive prevalence reporting and for one sensitivity analysis only.

3.4 Statistical analysis

Analyses were run in Python with pandas, SciPy, statsmodels (Seabold & Perktold, 2010) and semopy (Igolkina & Meshcheryakov, 2020), with a fixed random seed; α was .05, two-tailed. Measurement was examined first. A five-factor confirmatory factor analysis of all 38 items was compared with a one-factor model, the two-factor structure of the Grit-S was compared with a single grit factor, and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) was computed for every construct pair, with values at or above .85 taken as evidence of insufficient discriminance (Henseler et al., 2015). Fit was judged against conventional heuristics (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

H1 and H2 were tested in one ordinary least squares regression entering both grit facets simultaneously (Model 1). Because H2 states the absence of a negative association, the one-sided probability of a negative coefficient is reported together with an equivalence test against a smallest standardised coefficient of interest of β = ±.10 (Lakens et al., 2018). H3 was tested by comparing Model 1 with a nested model to which BFI-2 conscientiousness was added (Model 2). The change in the perseverance coefficient, and in the coefficient of total grit, was estimated with 5,000 nonparametric bootstrap resamples and percentile confidence intervals; the increment of the grit facets over conscientiousness was reported as ΔR^2 in the reverse entry order. The protocol did not quantify 'substantially'; the reduction is therefore reported with its confidence interval, and H3 is regarded as supported where the reduction is reliably different from zero and amounts to at least half of the original coefficient, a criterion stated here rather than prespecified. H4 was tested by hierarchical moderated regression with mean-centred terms, entering perseverance, consistency and attainability in Step 1 and the product of consistency and attainability in Step 2, with simple slopes at −1 *SD*, the mean and +1 *SD* of attainability (Aiken & West, 1991) and Johnson–Neyman regions of significance over the observed range of the moderator (Johnson & Neyman, 1936).

The Benjamini–Hochberg (1995) procedure was applied across the four primary tests. Heteroscedasticity (Breusch–Pagan), normality of residuals (Shapiro–Wilk), multicollinearity (variance inflation factors) and influential cases (Cook's distance) were examined, and HC3 robust standard errors were computed. Robustness was examined with a specification curve for the focal perseverance coefficient (Simonsohn et al., 2020), with a logistic regression on the protocol cut-off, with the exclusion of influential cases and with the exclusion of respondents who gave identical answers to every item of an instrument block. Common method variance was examined with Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A sensitivity analysis indicated that the achieved sample provided 80% power (α = .05) to detect f^2 = 0.046 for a single term in a model with up to four terms, and correlations of $r \geq .21$ (Faul et al., 2009); the interaction test is therefore powered for small-to-medium but not for small moderation.

3.5 Deviations from the prespecified protocol

Five deviations are reported. First, the protocol planned 200 complete cases; recruitment ended with 171, and the minimum detectable single-term increment rose correspondingly from f^2 = 0.040 to f^2 = 0.046. Second, the protocol specified a brief measure of general psychological distress (for example the PHQ-4; Kroenke et al., 2009) as a covariate in every model, a randomised vignette and a marker variable for the confirmatory factor-analytic marker technique (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). None of these was part of the administered instrument set, so the incremental validity of the findings over general distress cannot be established, no experimental evidence is available, and Harman's test is reported in place of the marker model. Third, because there were no missing values, neither multiple imputation nor full information maximum likelihood was required. Fourth, the protocol listed invariant responding across an entire instrument block as an exclusion criterion. Ten respondents gave identical answers to every item of one block (two on the Grit-S, seven on the six-item attainability scale and one on the DCQ-12). Because all items of these short scales except the reverse-scored Grit-S items are keyed in the same direction, such patterns are not diagnostic of careless responding; the cases were retained, and the results without them are reported as a sensitivity analysis. Fifth, the protocol named a multiverse specification

International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
Volume 6, Issue 5, Sep. – Oct., 2026, pp: 477-488 ISSN: 3048-6874
www.ijhssm.org

curve without enumerating its specifications; those used here are listed in Section 4.6.

IV. Results

4.1 Measurement

The five-factor measurement model fitted acceptably, $\chi^2(655) = 753.92$, CFI = .965, TLI = .963, RMSEA = .030, whereas a one-factor model did not, $\chi^2(665) = 1654.13$, CFI = .652, RMSEA = .094; $\Delta\chi^2(10) = 900.21$, $p < .001$. The two-factor structure of the Grit-S fitted the data, $\chi^2(19) = 15.94$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, and markedly better than a single grit factor, $\chi^2(20) = 49.15$, CFI = .903, RMSEA = .093. All HTMT ratios were below .85; the highest were those of perseverance with conscientiousness (.78) and with consistency (.69), and the ratio of every other construct with crisis severity lay between .23 and .61. The latent correlation between perseverance and conscientiousness was .76, which anticipates the overlap examined under H3. The first unrotated component of all 38 items accounted for 30.8% of the variance, with 7 eigenvalues above unity.

4.2 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Scale characteristics are shown in Table 1. Crisis severity averaged 2.87 (SD = 0.54); 75 of 171 participants (43.9%, Wilson 95% CI [36.6, 51.4]) reached the protocol cut-off. No scale showed an absolute skew above 0.35 or an absolute excess kurtosis above 0.55. Age was unrelated to every study variable (all $|r| \le .12$, all $p \ge .12$), and women and men did not differ on any scale (all $p \ge .44$).

Table 1

Scale characteristics and internal consistency (N = 171)

Scale	*k*	*M*	*SD*	Range	Skew	Kurtosis	α	ω
Perseverance of effort (Grit-S)	4	3.47	0.59	1.50–4.75	−0.33	−0.07	.70	.71
Consistency of interest (Grit-S)	4	2.91	0.64	1.25–5.00	0.09	0.17	.75	.75
Grit total (Grit-S)	8	3.19	0.53	1.75–4.75	−0.17	0.11	.80	.80
Conscientiousness (BFI-2)	12	3.40	0.67	1.75–4.83	−0.07	−0.54	.93	.93
Perceived goal attainability	6	3.27	0.68	1.33–4.83	−0.03	−0.11	.89	.89
Crisis severity (DCQ-12)	12	2.87	0.54	1.50–4.58	−0.17	0.27	.88	.88

Note. k = number of items. All scales are item means on a five-point format. Kurtosis is excess kurtosis. ω = McDonald's omega total from a single-factor model of the respective items.

As Table 2 shows, perseverance was associated with lower crisis severity, $r = -.41$, 95% CI [−.53, −.28], and consistency more weakly so, $r = -.17$, 95% CI [−.31, −.02], $p = .026$. Conscientiousness showed the strongest association with severity, $r = -.55$, followed by perceived attainability, $r = -.46$. The grit facets correlated $r = .50$ with each other; conscientiousness correlated .63 with perseverance and .50 with consistency. Perceived attainability was related to perseverance, $r = .27$, but not to consistency, $r = .09$, $p = .247$.

Table 2

Bivariate Pearson correlations (N = 171)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Perseverance of effort	—						
2. Consistency of interest	.50**	—					
3. Grit total	.85**	.88**	—				
4. Conscientiousness	.63**	.50**	.65**	—			
5. Goal attainability	.27**	.09	.20**	.30**	—		
6. Crisis severity	−.41**	−.17*	−.33**	−.55**	−.46**	—	
7. Age	−.01	−.04	−.03	.05	.12	−.10	—

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). Grit total is the mean of the eight Grit-S items and overlaps with variables 1 and 2 by construction.

4.3 H1 and H2: the two grit facets

With both facets entered (Model 1, Table 3), the model accounted for 17.3% of the variance in crisis severity, $F(2, 168) = 17.60$, $p < .001$. Perseverance was negatively associated with severity, $b = -0.399$, $SE = 0.074$, $\beta = -.44$, $t(168) =$

International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
Volume 6, Issue 5, Sep. – Oct., 2026, pp: 477-488 ISSN: 3048-6874
www.ijhssm.org

−5.41, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−0.544, −0.253]. H1 is supported. Its coefficient was slightly larger than in the simple regression (β = −.41), because the weak negative zero-order association of consistency was entirely shared with perseverance.

Consistency of interest was not negatively associated with severity once perseverance was controlled, $b = 0.040$, $SE = 0.068$, β = .05, $t(168) = 0.59$, $p = .556$, 95% CI [−0.094, 0.175]; the one-sided probability of a negative coefficient was $p = .722$. H2 is supported. The support is, however, the absence of a reliable negative association and not the demonstration of a null association: the equivalence test against β = ±.10 was not significant, $p = .260$, and the lower confidence limit (β = −.11) does not exclude a small negative coefficient. Variance inflation factors were 1.33. Adding age and gender left both coefficients unchanged (perseverance β = −.44, $p < .001$; consistency β = .04, $p = .592$); none of the demographic terms was reliable.

Table 3

Regression of crisis severity on the grit facets without and with conscientiousness (N = 171)

Variable	*b*	*SE*	β	95% CI for *b*	*p*
Model 1					
Perseverance of effort	−0.399	0.074	−.44	[−0.544, −0.253]	< .001
Consistency of interest	0.040	0.068	.05	[−0.094, 0.175]	.556
$R^2 = .173$, $F(2, 168) = 17.60$, $p < .001$					
Model 2					
Perseverance of effort	−0.150	0.077	−.16	[−0.302, 0.001]	.052
Consistency of interest	0.154	0.064	.18	[0.028, 0.280]	.017
Conscientiousness	−0.437	0.068	−.54	[−0.572, −0.302]	< .001
$R^2 = .336$, $\Delta R^2 = .163$, $p < .001$					

Note. Model 1 tests H1 and H2; the comparison of Model 1 and Model 2 tests H3. β = standardised coefficient. Reduction of the perseverance coefficient from Model 1 to Model 2: 0.249, bootstrap 95% CI [0.148, 0.362] (5,000 resamples); the reduction describes shared variance only.

4.4 H3: grit and conscientiousness

Adding conscientiousness (Model 2) raised the explained variance from .173 to .336, $\Delta R^2 = .163$, $F(1, 167) = 40.92$, $p < .001$. Conscientiousness was associated with lower severity, $b = −0.437$, $SE = 0.068$, β = −.54, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−0.572, −0.302]. The perseverance coefficient fell from $b = −0.399$ to $b = −0.150$, $SE = 0.077$, β = −.16, $p = .052$, 95% CI [−0.302, 0.001]. The reduction was 0.249, bootstrap 95% CI [0.148, 0.362], or 62.3% of the Model 1 coefficient (95% CI [37.6%, 101.0%]).

For total grit the overlap was complete. Its coefficient moved from $b = −0.336$ (β = −.33, $p < .001$) to $b = 0.048$ (β = .05, $p = .579$), and total grit added $\Delta R^2 = .001$ to conscientiousness, $F(1, 168) = 0.31$, $p = .579$. Entered as two facets, grit added $\Delta R^2 = .030$ beyond conscientiousness, $F(2, 167) = 3.82$, $p = .024$, bootstrap 95% CI [.004, .091]. This small increment did not reflect perseverance: with conscientiousness held constant, consistency of interest acquired a positive coefficient, $b = 0.154$, β = .18, $p = .017$, 95% CI [0.028, 0.280], a pattern of suppression that was not hypothesised and is treated as exploratory. H3 is supported: the reduction was reliably different from zero and its point estimate exceeded half of the original coefficient, although the lower confidence limit (38%) does not exclude a smaller reduction.

This reduction describes shared variance and carries no information about intervening processes. In the reversed ordering, in which perseverance is regressed on crisis severity and consistency, entering conscientiousness reduced the severity coefficient from $b = −0.372$ to $b = −0.149$ (60.0%), a proportion almost identical to that in the hypothesised ordering. Both orderings are saturated observed-variable models ($\chi^2 = 0.00$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00) and reproduce the observed covariance matrix exactly.

4.5 H4: perceived goal attainability as a moderator

The model without the product term (Step 1) accounted for 30.0% of the variance. Adding the product of mean-centred consistency and attainability raised this to 33.4%, $\Delta R^2 = .033$, $F(1, 166) = 8.27$, $p = .005$, $f^2 = .050$. The interaction was negative, $b = −0.247$, $SE = 0.086$, β = −.20, $t(166) = −2.88$, 95% CI [−0.417, −0.078] (Table 4).

At low perceived attainability (−1 *SD*), consistency of interest was positively associated with crisis severity, $b = 0.160$, $SE = 0.078$, $p = .042$,

International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
Volume 6, Issue 5, Sep. – Oct., 2026, pp: 477-488 ISSN: 3048-6874
www.ijhssm.org

95% CI [0.006, 0.314]; at the mean it was unrelated to severity, b = −0.009, p = .889; at high attainability (+1 *SD*) the slope was negative but not reliable, b = −0.177, *SE* = 0.093, p = .058. The Johnson–Neyman analysis located transition points at attainability scores of 2.63 and 4.01. Below the first, where 15.2% of participants fell, the association between consistency and severity was reliably positive; above the second, where 14.0% fell, it was reliably negative. H4 is supported. The interaction was stable when perseverance was omitted (b = −0.244, p = .008), when conscientiousness was added (b = −0.236, p = .003) and under HC3 standard errors (p = .005). An exploratory analogous interaction of perseverance with attainability was not reliable (b = −0.129, p = .136).

Table 4

Moderation of the consistency–severity association by perceived goal attainability (N = 171)

Variable	*b*	*SE*	β	95% CI for *b*	*p*
Step 1					
Perseverance of effort	−0.299	0.070			< .001
Consistency of interest	0.022	0.063			.728
Goal attainability	−0.293	0.053			< .001
R^2 = .300					
Step 2					
Perseverance of effort	−0.300	0.069	−.33	[−0.436, −0.164]	< .001
Consistency of interest	−0.009	0.063	−.01	[−0.132, 0.115]	.889
Goal attainability	−0.307	0.052	−.39	[−0.410, −0.203]	< .001
Consistency × Attainability	−0.247	0.086	−.20	[−0.417, −0.078]	.005
R^2 = .334, ΔR^2 = .033, p = .005					
Simple slopes of consistency					
Attainability −1 *SD*	0.160	0.078		[0.006, 0.314]	.042
Attainability at mean	−0.009	0.063		[−0.132, 0.115]	.889
Attainability +1 *SD*	−0.177	0.093		[−0.360, 0.006]	.058

Note. Variables mean-centred; β from the model with standardised variables and their product. Johnson–Neyman transition points at attainability = 2.63 and 4.01 (observed range 1.33–4.83).

4.6 Multiplicity and robustness

After Benjamini–Hochberg correction, the tests for H1 (p_{adj} < .001), H3 (p_{adj} < .001) and H4 (p_{adj} = .006) remained significant, and the test relevant to H2 remained non-significant (p_{adj} = .556), as H2 requires. Breusch–Pagan tests gave no indication of heteroscedasticity (p = .857 to .909), residuals did not depart from normality (Shapiro–Wilk $p \geq .556$), and the largest Cook's distance was 0.095. Removing cases with Cook's distance above 4/n left the H1 and H2 results unchanged (n = 162; perseverance b = −0.386, p < .001; consistency b = 0.031, p = .627) and weakened but did not remove the H4 interaction (n = 160, b = −0.183, p = .034). Excluding the ten respondents with invariant block responses (n = 161) changed no conclusion: perseverance β = −.44, p < .001; consistency p = .492; reduction of the perseverance coefficient 62.5%; interaction b = −0.243, p = .007.

With the protocol cut-off as a binary outcome, perseverance was associated with lower odds of reaching it, *OR* = 0.29, 95% CI [0.15, 0.58], p < .001, and consistency was not, *OR* = 0.81, 95% CI [0.45, 1.48], p = .498; with conscientiousness added, the perseverance odds ratio was no longer reliable (*OR* = 0.49, p = .066). The specification curve crossed four sample definitions (all cases; without influential cases; ages 18 to 25; without the non-binary group), six covariate sets and two estimators (OLS, Huber robust regression). Across its 48 specifications the standardised perseverance coefficient ranged from −.48 to −.12 (median −.38); all were negative and 77.1% were significant; each of the non-significant specifications included conscientiousness. Across 40 specifications for consistency, none yielded a significant negative coefficient.

V. Discussion

Of the two facets of grit, only perseverance of effort was associated with lower quarter-life crisis severity, and most of that association was shared with conscientiousness. Consistency of interest was, on average, unrelated to severity once perseverance was held constant, but this average concealed a crossover: consistency was associated with greater

International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
Volume 6, Issue 5, Sep. – Oct., 2026, pp: 477-488 ISSN: 3048-6874
www.ijhssm.org

severity among emerging adults who regarded their main goal as hard to attain, and with lower severity among those who regarded it as attainable. All four prespecified hypotheses were supported, the second in the weaker sense that a negative association was absent rather than a null association demonstrated.

5.1 Relation to the literature

The facet asymmetry replicates, for a developmental outcome, what has been reported for well-being and achievement (Credé et al., 2017; Disabato et al., 2019; Hou et al., 2022). It extends that literature in one respect. Studies of well-being have typically concluded that consistency of interest is inert. The moderation result suggests that inertness may be an artefact of averaging over people whose goals differ in viability. Where the main life goal was seen as attainable, stable interest went with less crisis; where it was seen as out of reach, stable interest went with more. This is the pattern that Brunstein (1993) described for goal commitment and that the goal disengagement literature (Heckhausen et al., 2010; Wrosch, Scheier, Carver, & Schulz, 2003) would lead one to expect of a disposition that sustains a given goal irrespective of its prospects.

The result also bears on Robinson's (2019) distinction between locked-in and locked-out forms of quarter-life crisis. A locked-in crisis is marked by continued commitment to a structure that no longer fits. The positive association between consistency and severity at low attainability is what one would observe if steadfast interest in an unviable direction were part of that experience, although the same association would arise if a crisis made young adults both more pessimistic about their goals and more aware of their inability to relinquish them. The persistence of gritty individuals in costly situations (Lucas et al., 2015) is consistent with the first reading; the design cannot rule out the second.

For the debate about grit and conscientiousness, the present data are unambiguous in one direction. Once conscientiousness was entered, total grit accounted for no variance in crisis severity, and the perseverance coefficient lost about three fifths of its size and its statistical reliability. The latent correlation between perseverance and conscientiousness (.76) is close to the meta-analytic estimate for grit and conscientiousness (Credé et al., 2017), and the overlap is consistent with facet-level analyses that locate grit within industriousness (Schmidt et al., 2018). What grit adds, if anything, is not its perseverance component but the consistency component, which became positively related to severity when conscientiousness was held constant. This suppression pattern was not hypothesised and should be replicated before it is interpreted, but it converges with the moderation result: the part of consistency that is not conscientiousness is the part that goes with more, not less, crisis.

The findings fit a broader view within positive psychology that the value of a strength depends on the conditions of its use. Judgements of courageous persistence depend on the value of the goal pursued (Pury et al., 2024), and persistence-related virtues appear to develop in concert during goal pursuit (Ridder et al., 2025). The present data add that the correlates of stable interest depend on whether its object remains within reach.

5.2 Practical implications

The data do not support recommending grit to young adults in crisis as a single disposition. They are compatible with a more differentiated message: effortful engagement is associated with lower crisis severity, but its association is largely that of conscientiousness, and steadfast attachment to a particular goal is associated with lower severity only where that goal is seen as attainable. Counselling for emerging adults might therefore attend to the perceived viability of the goal before encouraging persistence, and treat the capacity to disengage and re-engage as a resource rather than a failure (Barlow et al., 2020; Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, et al., 2003). Because the design is cross-sectional, these are implications for what to assess and discuss, not evidence that altering goal commitment would alter crisis severity.

5.3 Limitations

The design is cross-sectional and single-source. The directional language of the theoretical framework reflects theoretical reasoning and not identification. The reversed model, in which crisis severity is the antecedent of perseverance, fits the data equally well: both orderings are saturated (CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .00) and the share of variance that conscientiousness accounts for is almost identical in both (62% and 60%). The present findings therefore constrain but do not identify the direction of association. Cross-sectional estimates of processes that unfold over time can be biased in either direction (Maxwell & Cole, 2007), and no claim about intervening processes is made.

All variables were assessed by self-report on one occasion. Procedural remedies (block randomisation, separate instrument blocks) and Harman's test, whose first component accounted for 30.8% of the variance, do not rule out common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The

International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)
Volume 6, Issue 5, Sep. – Oct., 2026, pp: 477-488 ISSN: 3048-6874
www.ijhssm.org

marker variable, the randomised vignette and the general-distress covariate foreseen in the protocol were not administered, so it remains open whether the associations reported here hold beyond general negative affectivity, which is the most obvious shared correlate of low conscientiousness and crisis severity (Kotov et al., 2010). The attainability measure refers to a single self-nominated goal and was specified for this study; its relation to established goal-appraisal and goal-adjustment instruments is unknown.

Recruitment by self-selection from Reddit communities limits external validity. Platform membership is selective with respect to age, internet use and willingness to discuss personal difficulties, and those who responded plausibly differ from those who did not on the dimensions under study. No weighting can correct a selection process whose selection rule is unobserved, and no population estimate, including the prevalence of 43.9% at or above the cut-off, should be read from these data.

The achieved sample of 171 falls short of the planned 200. The study was powered for single-term increments of $f^2 \approx 0.046$; the interaction observed ($f^2 = .050$) lies near that limit, its confidence interval is wide, and its size shrank when influential cases were removed. The H4 result is therefore the finding most in need of replication.

5.4 Outlook

Three lines of work follow. Longitudinal designs that assess grit facets, perceived attainability and crisis severity at several points across the twenties are needed to establish whether steadfast interest in an unviable goal precedes crisis, follows it or both. Studies should include a measure of general distress and a dedicated goal-adjustment instrument, so that consistency of interest can be separated from low disengagement capacity. Finally, the suppression pattern in which consistency becomes positively related to severity once conscientiousness is held constant should be tested in larger samples, because it indicates which part of grit, if any, carries information beyond the Big Five.

In sum, perseverance of effort is associated with less quarter-life crisis mainly insofar as it is conscientiousness, and consistency of interest is associated with less or more crisis depending on whether the goal in question is seen as reachable. For emerging adults, the relevant question is not how gritty they are, but whether the direction they are persisting in remains open to them.

Data availability statement

The anonymised dataset and the analysis code supporting the findings of this study are available from the author on reasonable request. The design, hypotheses, instrumentation and analysis plan were fixed in a written study protocol completed before the first participant was recruited, so that the confirmatory status of the hypotheses is verifiable.

References

[1]. Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Sage.

[2]. Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist, 55*(5), 469–480. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469

[3]. Arnett, J. J. (2015). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

[4]. Barlow, M. A., Wrosch, C., & McGrath, J. J. (2020). Goal adjustment capacities and quality of life: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Personality, 88*(2), 307–323. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12492

[5]. Benjamini, Y., & Hochberg, Y. (1995). Controlling the false discovery rate: A practical and powerful approach to multiple testing. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series B (Methodological), 57*(1), 289–300. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2517-6161.1995.tb02031.x

[6]. Brandtstädter, J., & Renner, G. (1990). Tenacious goal pursuit and flexible goal adjustment: Explication and age-related analysis of assimilative and accommodative strategies of coping. *Psychology and Aging, 5*(1), 58–67. https://doi.org/10.1037/0882-7974.5.1.58

[7]. Brunstein, J. C. (1993). Personal goals and subjective well-being: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65*(5), 1061–1070. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.65.5.1061

[8]. Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (1990). Origins and functions of positive and negative affect: A control-process view. *Psychological Review, 97*(1), 19–35. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.97.1.19

[9]. Credé, M. (2018). What shall we do about grit? A critical review of what we know and what we don't know. *Educational*

Researcher, 47(9), 606–611. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X18801322

[10]. Credé, M., Tynan, M. C., & Harms, P. D. (2017). Much ado about grit: A meta-analytic synthesis of the grit literature. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 113*(3), 492–511. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000102

[11]. Datu, J. A. D., Valdez, J. P. M., & King, R. B. (2016). Perseverance counts but consistency does not! Validating the Short Grit Scale in a collectivist setting. *Current Psychology, 35*(1), 121–130. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-015-9374-2

[12]. Disabato, D. J., Goodman, F. R., & Kashdan, T. B. (2019). Is grit relevant to well-being and strengths? Evidence across the globe for separating perseverance of effort and consistency of interests. *Journal of Personality, 87*(2), 194–211. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12382

[13]. Duckworth, A. L., & Quinn, P. D. (2009). Development and validation of the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S). *Journal of Personality Assessment, 91*(2), 166–174. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223890802634290

[14]. Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(6), 1087–1101. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087

[15]. Duckworth, A., & Gross, J. J. (2014). Self-control and grit: Related but separable determinants of success. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 23*(5), 319–325. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414541462

[16]. Dunn, T. J., Baguley, T., & Brunsden, V. (2014). From alpha to omega: A practical solution to the pervasive problem of internal consistency estimation. *British Journal of Psychology, 105*(3), 399–412. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.12046

[17]. Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Buchner, A., & Lang, A.-G. (2009). Statistical power analyses using G*Power *3.1: Tests for correlation and regression analyses.* Behavior Research Methods, 41*(4), 1149–1160. https://doi.org/10.3758/BRM.41.4.1149

[18]. Heckhausen, J., Wrosch, C., & Schulz, R. (2010). A motivational theory of life-span development. *Psychological Review, 117*(1), 32–60. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017668

[19]. Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 43*(1), 115–135. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-014-0403-8

[20]. Hou, X.-L., Becker, N., Hu, T.-Q., Koch, M., Xi, J.-Z., & Mõttus, R. (2022). Do grittier people have greater subjective well-being? A meta-analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 48*(12), 1701–1716. https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672211053453

[21]. Hu, L., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling, 6*(1), 1–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705519909540118

[22]. Igolkina, A. A., & Meshcheryakov, G. (2020). semopy: A Python package for structural equation modeling. *Structural Equation Modeling, 27*(6), 952–963. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705511.2019.1704289

[23]. Jiang, W., Jiang, J., Du, X., Gu, D., Sun, Y., & Zhang, Y. (2020). Striving and happiness: Between- and within-person-level associations among grit, needs satisfaction and subjective well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 15*(4), 543–555. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2019.1639796

[24]. Johnson, P. O., & Neyman, J. (1936). Tests of certain linear hypotheses and their application to some educational problems. *Statistical Research Memoirs, 1*, 57–93.

[25]. Klinger, E. (1975). Consequences of commitment to and disengagement from incentives. *Psychological Review, 82*(1), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0076171

[26]. Kotov, R., Gamez, W., Schmidt, F., & Watson, D. (2010). Linking "big" personality traits to anxiety, depressive, and substance use disorders: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*(5), 768–821. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020327

[27]. Kroenke, K., Spitzer, R. L., Williams, J. B. W., & Löwe, B. (2009). An ultra-brief screening scale for anxiety and depression: The PHQ-4. *Psychosomatics, 50*(6), 613–621. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.psy.50.6.613

[28]. Lakens, D., Scheel, A. M., & Isager, P. M. (2018). Equivalence testing for psychological research: A tutorial. *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science, 1*(2),

259–269. https://doi.org/10.1177/2515245918770963

[29]. Lindell, M. K., & Whitney, D. J. (2001). Accounting for common method variance in cross-sectional research designs. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*(1), 114–121. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.1.114

[30]. Lucas, G. M., Gratch, J., Cheng, L., & Marsella, S. (2015). When the going gets tough: Grit predicts costly perseverance. *Journal of Research in Personality, 59*, 15–22. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2015.08.004

[31]. Maxwell, S. E., & Cole, D. A. (2007). Bias in cross-sectional analyses of longitudinal mediation. *Psychological Methods, 12*(1), 23–44. https://doi.org/10.1037/1082-989X.12.1.23

[32]. McDonald, R. P. (1999). *Test theory: A unified treatment*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

[33]. Muenks, K., Wigfield, A., Yang, J. S., & O'Neal, C. R. (2017). How true is grit? Assessing its relations to high school and college students' personality characteristics, self-regulation, engagement, and achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 109*(5), 599–620. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000153

[34]. Petrov, N., Robinson, O. C., & Arnett, J. J. (2022). The Developmental Crisis Questionnaire (DCQ-12): Psychometric development and validation. *Journal of Adult Development, 29*(4), 265–278. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-022-09403-w

[35]. Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(5), 879–903. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.88.5.879

[36]. Pury, C. L. S., Starkey, C. B., & Olson, L. R. (2024). Value of goal predicts accolade courage: More evidence that courage is a taking a worthwhile risk. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 19*(2), 236–242. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2023.2178959

[37]. Ridder, R. J., Matsuo, H., Witvliet, C. V. O., Jeffrey, A., Melton, K. K., Glanzer, P. L., & Schnitker, S. A. (2025). Tandem virtue development: Latent growth trajectories of welcoming accountability, patience, and courage in goal pursuit. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2025.2594198

[38]. Roberts, B. W., Lejuez, C., Krueger, R. F., Richards, J. M., & Hill, P. L. (2014). What is conscientiousness and how can it be assessed? *Developmental Psychology, 50*(5), 1315–1330. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031109

[39]. Robinson, O. C. (2015). Emerging adulthood, early adulthood and quarter-life crisis: Updating Erikson for the twenty-first century. In R. Žukauskienė (Ed.), *Emerging adulthood in a European context* (pp. 17–30). Routledge.

[40]. Robinson, O. C. (2019). A longitudinal mixed-methods case study of quarter-life crisis during the post-university transition: Locked-out and locked-in forms in combination. *Emerging Adulthood, 7*(3), 167–179. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696818764144

[41]. Robinson, O. C., & Wright, G. R. T. (2013). The prevalence, types and perceived outcomes of crisis episodes in early adulthood and midlife: A structured retrospective-autobiographical study. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 37*(5), 407–416. https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025413492464

[42]. Robinson, O. C., Petrov, N., Vleioras, G., Çok, F., Ozdogan, H. K., Yeler, Z., Berber, K., Millová, K., Sajjad, S., Dutra-Thomé, L., Rahayu, M. N. M., Rasyida, A., Aprodita, N. P., Mishra, S., Sharma, P., Srivastava, A., Dermitzaki, I., Spyrou, A., Mante, E., … Fisher, A. (2025). Quarter-life crisis episodes in emerging adulthood: A mixed-methods analysis of data from eight countries. *Emerging Adulthood, 13*(6). https://doi.org/10.1177/21676968251380890

[43]. Schmidt, F. T. C., Nagy, G., Fleckenstein, J., Möller, J., & Retelsdorf, J. (2018). Same same, but different? Relations between facets of conscientiousness and grit. *European Journal of Personality, 32*(6), 705–720. https://doi.org/10.1002/per.2171

[44]. Seabold, S., & Perktold, J. (2010). Statsmodels: Econometric and statistical modeling with Python. In *Proceedings of the 9th Python in Science Conference* (pp. 92–96). https://doi.org/10.25080/Majora-92bf1922-011

[45]. Simonsohn, U., Simmons, J. P., & Nelson, L. D. (2020). Specification curve analysis.

Nature Human Behaviour, 4(11), 1208–1214. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0912-z

[46]. Soto, C. J., & John, O. P. (2017). The next Big Five Inventory (BFI-2): Developing and assessing a hierarchical model with 15 facets to enhance bandwidth, fidelity, and predictive power. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 113*(1), 117–143. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000096

[47]. Vazsonyi, A. T., Ksinan, A. J., Ksinan Jiskrova, G., Mikuška, J., Javakhishvili, M., & Cui, G. (2019). To grit or not to grit, that is the question! *Journal of Research in Personality, 78*, 215–226. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2018.12.006

[48]. Von Culin, K. R., Tsukayama, E., & Duckworth, A. L. (2014). Unpacking grit: Motivational correlates of perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 9*(4), 306–312. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.898320

[49]. Wrosch, C., Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Schulz, R. (2003). The importance of goal disengagement in adaptive self-regulation: When giving up is beneficial. *Self and Identity, 2*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860309021

[50]. Wrosch, C., Scheier, M. F., Miller, G. E., Schulz, R., & Carver, C. S. (2003). Adaptive self-regulation of unattainable goals: Goal disengagement, goal reengagement, and subjective well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 29*(12), 1494–1508. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167203256921